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MEMORANDUM FOR:

From:

Subject: Career Development

Per your request, the following comments provide descriptive data on our organization's career development programs.

As background information, it is important to realize that the Agency's human resource structure is divided into five Career Services (one representing each directorate and one representing the Executive Career Service). Each Career Service is responsible for the management, development and assignment of employees within their career discipline. Career Services are further divided into Sub-Groups at the Office level when employees are engaged in similar activities, perform similar duties or possess similar skills.

Request 2: Describe your policies, objectives, program and activities (other than training) related to career development....

There are three Offices that offer assistance across Career Services: Office of Personnel (OP), Office of Training and Education (OT&E) and Office of Medical Services (OMS). OP and OP personnel assigned to component and Directorate personnel offices administer personnel policy and are often sources of career counseling for employees. OT&E, whose policies and objectives are addressed in separate documentation, provides training relevant to career advancement. OMS provides, on a limited basis, a counseling service which includes aptitude and preference testing for employees. The degree to which any of these services are incorporated into Sub-Group career development programs is determined by the Sub-Group requirements and the availability of OP, OT&E or OMS resources.

Because of the division of Agency resources into Career Services and the latitude each Career Service has in establishing unique career development procedures, addressing an "Agency" program is virtually impossible. The amount of career counseling provided employees is a perfect example of this diversity. It is a matter of policy and tradition that career counseling is primarily the responsibility of each supervisor and this counseling must include performance evaluation and performance feedback. Managers are responsible for overseeing counseling for employees and for counseling supervisors. In addition, each Career Service and each Career Service Sub-Group has at least one individual designated for career counseling. Some Career Services and Sub-Groups have formalized this employee counseling with special programs, special training for counselors, mandatory feedback by the Career Service and/or Sub-Group career management personnel, etc. In other Career Services and Sub-Groups, the career counseling programs are less formalized. The amount and intensity of career counseling necessary is determined by the unique needs of the occupations and individuals within the Career Service or Sub-Group.

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Each individual aspect of a traditional career development program exists in one or another Career Service or Sub-Group. Career developmental profiles and effective employee or career development handbooks, structured programs for employee developmental assignments, viable dual tracks for experts and managers, effective succession planning, as well as employee assessment and placement all operate effectively within the Agency. Each meets a specific occupational or Sub-Group requirement. For instance, in Sub-Groups where long range programs are critical to the mission, succession planning is used as an effective tool to staff projects and develop program leaders; where expert knowledge is essential to the component mission, dual tracks have been established; occupations requiring a generalist employee routinely use structured developmental assignments. To date the objectives of career development programs have been primarily those associated with accomplishment of the individual Career Service or Sub-Group mission. When a need is identified, a program is established. If the established program is effective in addressing the existing need, the program is retained.

As is true in many other areas of human resource management, we have, as an Agency, been successful in meeting the career development needs of the majority of our employees. We do not suffer, presently, from high attrition rates, low employee commitment, or significant employee complaints. Our concerns in this specific area of human resource management are similar to our concerns in human resource management overall. U.S. demographic and economic trends, as well as human resource projections dictate a change in how we develop and motivate our employees. To the extent that our growth curve begins to flatten and our management positions are filled with younger employees, our ability to promote will become more restricted. Like private industry we have relied upon upward growth as the main feature of our career development programs and a restriction in our ability to continue in that mode will place new stress on existing career development programs. Advances in technology require new approaches to retaining and retraining technical employees in order to meet our mission requirements. Social changes dictate programs that meet the needs of employees, as well as the needs of the organization. In short, while we have been successful in the past, failure to adapt to the future will undermine that success.

With the current decentralization of all career development planning and implementation, we may be poorly positioned to respond quickly and efficiently to changing Agency-wide requirements. Decentralization dictates that each Career Service or Sub-Group develop or hire its own expertise to research and establish new programs. A centralized staff conversant with Agency culture and programs, reliable contract resources and effective career development approaches would reduce the inefficiency inherent in the current system. Program implementation would remain the responsibility of each Sub-Group or Career Service, but managers would not be forced to reinvent the wheel as each new requirement surfaced.

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Request 3: Describe how your training and career development programs are linked or related....

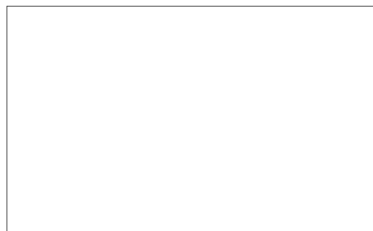
Again, the linkages between training and career development are for the most part determined by the occupation or Career Service. Overall, there is no Agency policy that directly relates the two activities. However, there are occupations where the established career development path relies heavily on skills building and, therefore, on formalized training as a significant factor for employee development. The two most noteworthy programs exist in those occupations currently experimenting with unique compensation systems -- our communicators and our secretaries. In both systems promotions to the full performance level and beyond are tied to training. Other, smaller programs do exist, but are again determined by occupational and mission needs not overall Agency policy requirements.

Request 4: Describe whether you have planning processes or mechanisms related to training and career development,...(b) long range workforce plan.... (c) succession planning....

Long range workforce planning and succession planning have, to date, been the concerns of the individual Career Services. As stated earlier, these activities do exist in individual components, but have not been systematically addressed as overall Agency programs. These two areas, however, have recently been the focus of senior management concern and action. Work is underway to develop the automation tools necessary for adequate workforce planning and to devise viable strategic plans that link more closely our mission and our employee development. Succession planning strategies are also being developed that will provide for the identification and development of skilled leaders.

In this area of human resource management, we may be significantly hampered by the very decentralization that has previously proved so successful. Decentralization by its very nature makes overall Agency planning more difficult. Centralizing and regulating all career development activities would fit neither our culture nor our needs. What would be appropriate, however, is the centralization and regulation of career development that crosses Career Services or affects Agency planning. At the moment no structure exists to provide this service to Agency managers. The institution of both a career development philosophy and an organizational unit that provides referent services, research, workforce projections and management of cross-directorate programs (like management succession planning) would allow us to plan appropriately and to retain the diversity of programs necessary to address individual component requirements.

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